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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Friday, May 1, announced its 2009 recommendations to Congress, the White House and the State Department that 13 nations—Burma, China, North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam—be named “countries of particular concern,” or CPCs.

“We are at a crucial time and place in history and the USCIRF report details a vital, yet sometimes underappreciated aspect of human rights facing lawmakers here and abroad,” said Felice D. Gaer, Chair of USCIRF. “In detailing religious abuse in 27 nations and making specific policy recommendations, the Commission report is a road map for U.S. policy makers and diplomats, that if followed will advance freedom, good governance and security for all. The Commission urges the Obama administration officials to review and implement these recommendations.”

The 2009 USCIRF Report is the most extensive in the Commission’s ten-year history, documenting serious abuses of freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief around the world. The report provides policy prescriptions for each nation on the CPC list.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires that the United States designate as CPCs those countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief.

Further, the Commission announced that the following countries are on the 2009 USCIRF Watch List: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Laos, Russia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Venezuela. While not rising to the statutory level set forth in IRFA requiring designation as a country of particular concern, these countries require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the governments.

Nigeria and Iraq were added to this year’s CPC list. Iraq was added in December and Nigeria on May 1.

USCIRF is a bipartisan Federal Commission, whose Commissioners are appointed by the President of the United States and the Senate and House of Representatives.

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